

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 00138 031233Z

20

ACTION EA-14

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P R 031111Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 9425

CONFIDENTIAL BANGKOK 0138

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: VN, VS

SUBJECT: THE THIRD FORCE IN VIETNAM

1. HO THONG MINH, GVN DEFENSE MINISTER IN 1954-55 AND SELF-PROCLAIMED REPRESENTATIVE OF THE THIRD FORCE, HAS BEEN ON VACATION IN THAILAND FROM PARIS FOR THE LAST COUPLE WEEKS. ON WRITTEN RECOMMENDATION FROM MARK PRATT IN PARIS, THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR HAD HIM TO LUNCH TWICE. HE FOUND MINH AN INTELLIGENT AND ENGAGING INDIVIDUAL, AND THEREFORE WILL NOT BE SENDING PRATT THE BILL FOR THE MEALS.

2. MINH SAYS THAT HE RESIGNED AS DEFENSE MINISTER IN PROTEST WHEN NGO DINH DIEM DECLARED WAR ON THE SECTS. JOSEPH BUTTINGER IN "VIETNAM: A DRAGON EMBATTLED" BEARS MONH OUT ON THIS CONTENTION, AND MAKES COMPLIMENTARY REFERENCES TO MINH.

3. MINH'S MAIN THESIS IS THAT ALTHOUGH NORTH VIETNAM HAS BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR 70 TO 80 PERCENT OF THE MILITARY VIOLATIONS OF THE PARIS AGREEMENTS, PRESIDENT THIEU HAS BEEN GUILTY OF 70 PERCENT OF THE POLITICAL VIOLATIONS. MINH CONTENDED THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARE SENDING CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 00138 031233Z

TROOPS DOWN THE TRAIL AS A MILITARY COUNTER TO THE POLITICAL

IMBALANCE IN THE SOUTH. MINH SEEMS PARTICULARLY DISTURBED THAT THIEU HAS NOT YET PERMITTED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE THIRD FORCE.

4. MINH ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THIEU WAS NECESSARY DURING THE APRIL 1972 OFFENSIVE, AND DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS LEADING UP TO THE PARIS AGREEMENTS. HE QUESTIONED WHETHER HE WAS STILL INDISPENSABLE. MINH SAID THAT THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE HE HAD TALKED TO IN PARIS INDICATED THAT THIEU WAS LOSING GROUND BECAUSE OF HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO BROADEN HIS REGIME. MINH ASKED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE CREATION OF THE THIRD FORCE. THE REPLY WAS THAT THERE SEEMED LITTLE CHANCE FOR SUCH AN EVENT. TAKING THE OFFENSIVE, WE ASKED MINH WHEN HE THOUGHT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WERE GOING TO BROADEN THEIR GOVERNMENT. MINH ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE WOULD HAVE TO SET THE EXAMPLE FIRST.

5. MINH ASKED THAT ON HIS FINAL DAY IN THAILAND, JANUARY 3, HE BE ALLOWED TO COME TO THE EMBASSY TO PRESENT A FORMAL APPROACH ON BEHALF OF THE THIRD FORCE. WE TOLD HIM THAT THE MOMENT WAS NOT PROPITIOUS IN VIEW OF NORTH VIETNAMESE SABRE RATTLING. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WE WERE RIGHT. HE PLANS TO LEAVE FOR PARIS AT MIDNIGHT, AND HOPES TO SEE PRATT SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN.

KINTNER

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